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Kennedy and China

The Chinese Communists profess willingness to negotiate about nuclear weapons, as suggested last week by Senator Robert Kennedy. The Senator said that, to prevent nuclear proliferation, the US "at an appropriate time and manner should vigorously pursue negotiations on this subject with China." Chinese willingness to negotiate wouldn't ensure the negotiations would get anywhere, of course. But after exploding its second atomic bomb on May 14, the Chinese government repeated its earlier proposal for "a summit conference of all countries to discuss the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons." The May 14 Chinese communique also said: "~~China will never be the first to use nuclear weapons.~~" ~~No such US pledge exists.~~ One way to help determine if the Chinese pledge is worth anything is to talk with them about it. Senator Kennedy pointed out that earlier last month 70 nations urged at the Disarmament Commission of the United Nations that China be included in any agreement to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The US government supports - in principle - a treaty to prevent such a spread. But whenever there is a threat of actual negotiation the US tends to mutter through official spokesmen that any conference that includes the Chinese will be turned by them into a propaganda circus which will only impede progress toward disarmament. This would make more sense if any progress whatever toward disarmament were discernible. Quite the contrary. Last November, President Johnson appointed a special committee headed by former Defense Under-Secretary Roswell L. Gilpatric to study the problem of nuclear spread. Its report was submitted to the White House three months ago, and was classified. Senator Kennedy said he would like to see the committee's work "carried forward by all concerned agencies of the government." But, according to Senator Clinton Anderson, the Gilpatric report is so top secret it has hitherto been withheld from both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.

Senator Kennedy feels there's no more time to lose. So does William C. Foster, head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, who says that even some months of further delay could be fatal. Five nations now have the capacity to explode nuclear bombs, said the Senator. Within three years, he thinks, the number may be more than a score. Relatively speaking, almost anybody can make the damned things, now or very soon. And, said Senator Kennedy, "once nuclear

war were to start, even between small, remote countries, it would be exceedingly difficult to stop a step-by-step progression of local war into a general conflagration. Eighty million Americans – and hundreds of millions of other people – would die within the first 24 hours of a full-scale nuclear exchange.” Is the Senator being too pessimistic? Not according to Defense Secretary McNamara, who told the House Armed Services Committee in February that the US might have 149 million fatalities if attacked by nuclear weapons in 1970. That’s only five years from now. Once nuclear weapons spread, Senator Kennedy warned, there can be no disarmament. Here’s how he sees the picture then: “A bomb obliterates the capital city of a nation in Latin America, or Africa, or Asia – or even the Soviet Union, or the United States. How was it delivered – by plane? by missile? by car or ship? There is no evidence. From where did it come – a jealous neighbor? an internal dissident? a great power bent on stirring up trouble – or an anonymous madman? There is only speculation. And what can be the response? – what but a reprisal grounded on suspicion, leading in ever-widening circles to the utter destruction of the world we know.”

The Senator suggested that the US as one of the two super-powers should try to get the world moving again, in a number of directions all aimed at preventing the deadly spread. The steps he proposed include nuclear-free zones, with Latin America and Africa for starters; extension of the test-ban treaty to cover underground tests just as fast as scientific progress in detection makes it possible to do this without endangering security; a freeze followed by a cut-back in the myriads of nuclear weapons possessed by the US and Russia; and a non-proliferation treaty to bind nations neither to give nor receive nuclear arms. Senator Kennedy is in a hurry, and admits it. We can’t, he says, wait for peace in Southeast Asia (“which will not come until nuclear weapons have spread beyond recall”), or for a general European settlement (“which has not existed since 1914”).

There are people who will say that Senator Kennedy is not just in a hurry, he is in a panic of appeasement. He isn’t. His sober warning needs to be heeded: “With every day that passes, the likelihood increases that another nation will develop the Bomb.”

Russell Long’s Capers

Senator Russell Long of Louisiana continues to confound the congressional world by his ability to court both the liberal and conservative poles without wrapping himself around either. After coming down strong on the side of an anti-poll-tax statute, he voted against the voting rights bill. Last week he fought for two

amendments to the Medicare bill: one to extend hospitalization coverage for an indefinite length of time, and the other to set up a kind of “means test” for the part of the hospital bill an individual has to chip in before the government begins to pay.

The first amendment had liberal support, and won a narrow vote in the Finance Committee. The second extension of coverage – had conservative (and American Medical Association) support and won hugely. It was not until some Senators returned to their offices that they found the proposed sliding scale of “deductibles” would actually increase costs of medical care for many of those who most need aid. Under the Administration bill, a person earning \$1,500 a year would pay the first \$40 of his hospital bill; that is the standard rate for everyone. Under Long’s amendment, the same person would pay the first \$80; someone earning \$3,000 a year (still at the poverty level) would pay \$180, and so on.

As Social Security supporters have been saying for years, the basis of the system is variable payments and equal benefits. Opponents of Social Security would like the system (including Medicare) to be a kind of Social Charity, with people permanently stratified into classes by a sliding rate of benefits according to income. Senator Long quite accurately calls the Administration’s Medicare plan (and, by implication, Social Security) “socialistic,” and warns that when it is extended to the whole population regardless of age – as he and everyone else knows it will be – the US will have got “socialized medicine” without admitting the fact.

After some classic political infighting, the Finance Committee reversed itself and rejected both amendments. Long is unperturbed; he may bring them up again when the bill reaches the Senate floor. He doesn’t think he can win, but it does his Louisiana heart good to see his friends squirm.

The Charge of Immorality

At last the courts have taken to task the Civil Service Commission for procedures it follows in hiring employees of the federal government. In a 2-1 decision the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit held that a man could not be disqualified for government employment because of vague, unspecified charges of homosexual conduct. He had applied for a job in the Department of Agriculture.

After taking competitive examinations for federal civil service employment, this man was notified by the government in 1962 that he had qualified for a personnel position, subject to further investigation. Later that same year he went before a Civil Service investigator